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BARREL-SHAPED
FLOWER POT
BLUE AND WHITE
ABOUT 1750

JAR
BLUE AND WHITE
ABOUT 1750-1800

BARREL-SHAPED
FLOWER POT
BLUE AND WHITE
ABOUT 1750

MEXICAN MAJOLICA

MRS. ROBERT W. DE FOREST has presented to the Museum the most important part of her collection of Mexican Majolica, or tin-enamelled pottery, which was recently exhibited at the Museum of the Hispanic Society of America. When shown by that Society, the collection was described in an illustrated catalogue¹ written by Dr. Edwin AtLee Barber, Director of the Pennsylvania Museum and School of Industrial Art, which gives the first detailed account of this very interesting art, and forms a contribution of much value to the general history of ceramics.

Through the courtesy of Mr. Archer M. Huntington of the Hispanic Society, and of Dr. Barber, we are permitted to quote the following paragraphs from the Introductory Notes to this volume.

The glazing of earthenware with oxid of tin is now believed to be of Saracenic origin, having first been introduced into Egypt and Persia by the Arabs, who afterward carried the art into Morocco, whence

it was taken by the Moors into Spain. Workmen who went from Spain to Italy established the art in the latter country. It next appeared in France, at Nevers and other places, and soon after in Holland and Germany, gradually spreading to almost every section of the Continent and into England.

It was not known to ceramic writers until five or six years ago that tin-enamelled pottery had ever been produced in the Western Hemisphere. Isolated examples of majolica had been brought back by American tourists in Mexico from time to time, but these were supposed to be of Spanish workmanship and were known as Talavera ware. Writers have frequently described the elaborate, and often remarkable tile-work of the old churches, convents, and other religious foundations of that country, with scarcely a thought as to its origin. Recent investigations, however, have resulted in the discovery that true stanniferous faience was made in Mexico by Spanish potters and their native pupils as early as the sixteenth century, and continued to be produced on a considerable scale until the present time. The ancient seat of the manufacture was Puebla, and for more than three centuries that city enjoyed a monopoly of the majolica industry.

¹ Catalogue of Mexican Majolica Belonging to Mrs. Robert W. de Forest. Exhibited by the Hispanic Society of America, February 18 to March 19, 1911. By Edwin AtLee Barber, Ph.D. New York, 1911.

Puebla, or La Puebla de los Angeles (the Town of the Angels), was founded as a new city by the Spaniards in 1532. At the beginning of the seventeenth century its manufactures of cotton, wool, glassware, and pottery had been firmly established and were famed throughout New and Old Spain. Unglazed pottery had been produced by native workmen since the time of the Conquest, but glazing was not introduced until potters were brought from Spain. Consul-General A. M. Gottschalk, lately of Mexico City, in a recent report to the State Department at Washington states: "In the early days of Puebla's history, the Dominican friars, struck by the aptitude of their Aztec parishioners at making crude native pottery, and desirous also of obtaining tiles for the monastery and church which they were building, sent word to the Dominican establishment at Talavera de la Reina, in the province of Toledo, Spain, that they could make good use of five or six of the brotherhood who were acquainted with the Spanish process of pottery-making, if such could be sent to them. Accordingly, a number of Dominican friars, familiar with the clay-working processes in use at Talavera, were assigned to the Puebla house of their order, and under them were trained a generation of workmen who for the first few succeeding years produced some excellent pieces."

By 1653 the majolica industry of Puebla had grown to such proportions, without restriction of any sort, that it became advisable to organize an association for the mutual protection and assistance of the master potters. Accordingly, a Potters' Guild was established in this year, records of which have been found among the official archives of the city.

Several influences were at work in the seventeenth century in developing the art of majolica-making in Mexico. The earliest pieces which are known to us, produced before 1700, are embellished with strapwork and scrolled patterns in Moresque style. An excellent example of this variety, from the lavatory of the old convent of San Francisco at Atlixco, is a laver, or basin, some twenty inches in diameter, decorated in dark blue outlined with black,

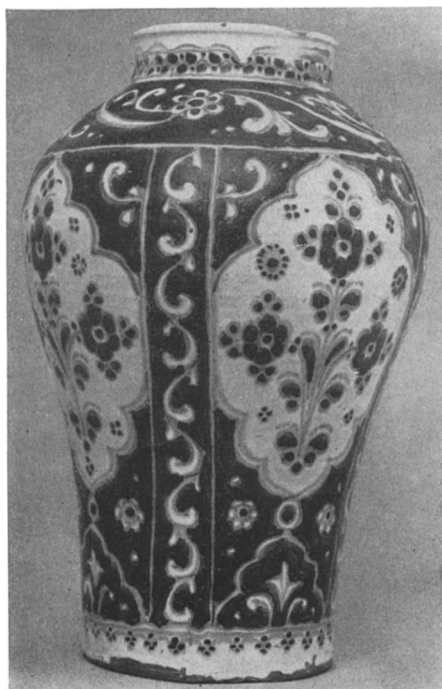
now in the collection of the Pennsylvania Museum in Philadelphia. A similar specimen, owned in Mexico,¹ bears around the margin the explanatory inscription, "Soy para labar los sacryfycadores y no mas" ("I am for washing the sacrificers [hands] and for nothing else"). The most important work of this character, however, is probably the dado in the Chapel of the Rosary, belonging to the Church of Santo Domingo in Puebla (erected in 1690), which consists of tin-enamelled tiles painted with a strapwork design in blue and white, alternating with panels of other tiles embossed with patterns in Moorish taste.

The Spanish influence naturally impressed itself upon the glazed pottery of Mexico at an early date, through the craftsmen who were brought from Talavera and other places in Spain. From about 1600 to 1650 the Spanish style of painting, by which we mean the introduction of birds and animals and figures of saints among the decorative motives, largely preponderated. But about the middle of the seventeenth century the extensive importation of Chinese porcelains into Mexico, through the port of Acapulco, began to stimulate the artistic zeal of the Pueblan potters, who soon commenced to imitate the Oriental forms and paintings, and rapidly developed a pseudo-Chinese style, which continued until about the middle of the following century.

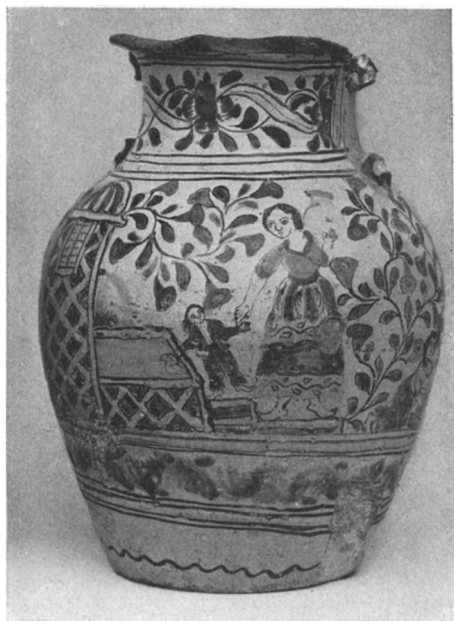
By the beginning of the nineteenth century the Chinese influence had entirely disappeared, and the later debased polychrome style of the Talavera majolica, which was developed in Spain in the latter part of the eighteenth century, was adopted in Mexico, which marked the beginning of the decadence of the art. New colors were introduced, and the products of the Hispano-Mexican period, which continued from about 1800 to 1860, became gaudy and flamboyant, and over-decoration vulgarized the ware.

A critical examination of the collections of Puebla pottery which are accessible to us enables us to divide these wares into

¹ This piece has been bought by Mrs. deForest since the article was written and will be added to the collection.



VASE
BLUE AND WHITE
ABOUT 1680-1700



WATER JAR
WITH POLYCHROME DECORATIONS



JAR WITH POLYCHROME DECORATION
ABOUT 1800

four classes, based on their distinctive forms and characteristic decorations, as follows:

- | | |
|--|--------------------|
| 1. The Moresque style | } Blue Monochrome. |
| 2. The Spanish, or Talavera style | |
| 3. The Chinese style | } Polychrome. |
| 4. The Hispano-Mexican, or Pueblan style | |

It is only within the past few years that the Mexicans themselves have commenced to recognize the true character of the tin-enamed pottery which is found in their country. Collectors in various parts of the republic have, as a result of recent discoveries, turned their attention to the gathering together and preservation of these remains of one of the earliest Hispano-Mexican arts. Of these local collections, that formed by Mr. Albert Pepper, an architect of the City of Mexico, has been recognized for many years as one of the most important. In the Pennsylvania Museum, Philadelphia, may be seen a representative group of these early wares. The interest in this subject, however, has not been confined to America, for we learn that European collectors have lately been attracted to this field of research, and groups of Mexican majolica have already

been sent to Germany, France, and England.

Mrs. Robert W. de Forest, who for many years has been engaged in collecting the folk pottery of all peoples, during a trip to Mexico in 1904 became interested in the pottery of Puebla, and at that time gathered together the nucleus of her present collection. Through the assistance of Mrs. Zelia Nuttall of Coyoacán, she has been able to add, from time to time, many rare and valuable examples, and her recent acquisition of the well-known collection of Mr. Albert Pepper has made her collection one of the most extensive and representative of its kind. It is particularly rich in polychrome pieces, dating from about 1800 to 1860.

The majolica of Mexico, crude and in-artistic as it frequently appears, possesses an element of manly vigor, in the boldness of its modeling and decorative treatment, which gives it an individuality of its own. The reflection of the virile art of Spain, combined with the refining influence of Oriental traditions, resulted in the development of a composite style of pottery, which at its best period, between 1650 and 1750, was quite distinct from the wares produced in any other country.



ALBARELLO
ABOUT 1700-1750

BASIN
ABOUT 1800

ALBARELLO
ABOUT 1750-1800